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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Ukraine Bush Administration
PARIS - Thursday, December 29, 2005

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Ukraine
Bush Administration

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

The cold wave passing through France and its socio-economic consequences is one of today's major front-page stories. The videotape claiming responsibility for the kidnapping of the French hostage in Iraq, Bernard Planché, and threatening to execute him, is featured on the front page of Le Figaro, while the story is extensively reported in all other outlets. Le Figaro points out that "it will be difficult to give in to the requests of the kidnappers, considering that France has no troops present in Iraq. The demand could just be a front for a ransom demand." Liberation notes: "The French government has reiterated that all French journalists, businessmen and humanitarian workers try to avoid Iraq." In regional L'Indépendant du Midi the editorial comments: "Every foreigner present in Iraq today knows that he can, at any moment, become a negotiable merchandise. The French government will be involved in secret negotiations of which we will know practically nothing. As was the case for Aubenas, Malbrunot and Chesnot."

The launching of Galileo continues to elicit commentaries praising Europe's technological capabilities and lamenting its inability to stand united politically. In regional La Provence Gilles Dauxerre writes: "Europe, which has so much trouble functioning on earth, has succeeded in the skies." Regional L'Alsace comments in its editorial: "The Americans tried in vain to keep Europe from implementing Galileo, which proves the strategic importance of the project." Le Figaro carries an interview with FM Douste-Blazy: "This is a historic moment for Europe, demonstrating the capacity for individual nations to cooperate. Europe is proving it can innovate when it goes with its ambitions. Galileo is the symbol of an independent Europe, which is no one's vassal. With Galileo, Europe has freed itself from the dependency it had on the U.S. and its GPS."

Catholic La Croix devotes its lead story and editorial to Pakistan. The headline reads "It Is Time to Help Pakistan" while the editorial calls on international solidarity so that "the Pakistanis might feel they count for the rest of the world. We must not leave the Pakistani government alone to deal with the victims of the earthquake. The needs are huge, the donations insufficient. International aid proved less generous for Pakistan than for the Tsunami victims."

Stories continue to abound on the tension between Moscow and Kiev over energy resources. The editorial in Le Monde asks: "Will Putin execute the threats he has made and cut Ukraine's gas supply?" Le Figaro carries an analysis titled: "Why the EU Must Get Involved in Ukraine." (See Part C)

Also in Le Figaro, Washington correspondent Philippe Gelie reports on the refurbishing of the White House pressroom, commenting that "the conditions of the room possibly reflect the waning power of the Bush administration." (See Part C)

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Bush Administration

"Scott McClellan and the Wear and Tear of Power"
Philippe Gelie in right-of-center Le Figaro (12/29): "The temporary physical move of the White House pressroom could accentuate the tension between Scott McClellan and foreign correspondents whom he tries to both influence and keep at a distance. The rundown pressroom has come to reflect the wear and tear of power in the Bush administration. The White House spokesman is moving his lectern temporarily across the street, unless he decides to give up all together. More than for the President, the year has been an annus horribilis for the administration's spokesman. The list of difficult incidents and events is long: violence in Iraq, the loss of support for the war, doubts about the justification for going to war, the

calamitous management of Katrina, the misstep of the Harriet Myers nomination, the leaks in the Valerie Plame affair, and the indictment of Lewis Libby. The long list of bad news could have broken the bravest of servants. It has left its mark on McClellan who appears to have lost a few hairs. In a country where official lies can bring down an administration, Scott McClellan's image has taken a severe blow. The mistrust between the seat of power and the press goes way back to Watergate. The attitude of the besieged adopted by the Bush administration has contributed to keeping the press at a distance, communicating by way of propagandistic releases and a 'no comment' approach, leading the Washington Post to call McClellan 'the man with no answers.'

Ukraine

"The EU Must Get Involved in Ukraine"

Pierre Rousselin in right-of-center Le Figaro (12/29): "The Kremlin will do all it can to bring Ukraine into the fold. The war over gas supplies launched by Moscow is part of the strategy. It is Putin's way of influencing Ukraine's voters and making them believe their interests have been compromised by their President's pro-western stance. The fate of Ukraine and Russia are intimately tied to one another. While Kiev is calling on Washington, Europe cannot turn its back on such a serious crisis, if only because of its own energy needs. And because, if Ukraine succeeds in its democratization, it will be a form of guarantee that Russia can also evolve peacefully towards more harmonious relations with the EU." STAPLETON